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SUBJECT: MOURIDE KHALIF BANS POLITICS IN TOUBA

REF: A. DAKAR 1427

1B. DAKAR 1149

1C. 05 DAKAR 3108

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Mouride Khalif has banned campaigning in his brotherhood's capital. As Senegal's fastest growing city, with at least half 800,000 souls, Touba looked to become a political battleground for 2007 elections. The holy city by tradition has no polling station, and was considered politically off-limits until Mouride Abdoulaye Wade campaigned there in 2000. While Mourides are by no means a monolithic bloc, Wade presumably retains sympathy there, so the ban on campaigning will not help him. END SUMMARY.

VOTE WITH YOUR FEET

¶2. (SBU) Mouride religious leaders allow GOS services and civil servants to operate in Touba, but the city remains in many ways independent of central government and the state recognizes the Khalif's powers and prerogatives (Ref C). The ban on campaigning followed a recent incident in which dissidents in Wade's ruling Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS), threw stones at national party leaders. The Khalif will allow voter registration, but, as in the past, he will probably exclude polling booths and Toubiens will need to go to neighboring MBacke to vote.

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

¶3. (SBU) While there are partisan divisions in Touba, the ban on campaigning will probably hurt Wade more than anyone else, since he is the only serious Mouride presidential candidate. The Khalif and his advisers, though, are not casting the ban primarily as a show of political neutrality. Rather, they describe it as a way of renewing the city's spiritual anchoring in Islam and as a rejection of the permissive society they see infecting the holy city. Traditionalists around the aging Khalif particularly deplore the "cultural animation" -- music and dancing -- that accompany political rallies.

COMMENT

¶4. (SBU) The Khalif is pushing 90 and only dimly aware of what is going on in the city, so the campaign ban comes from his entourage. For them, banning open political competition, and doing so by emphasizing the dictates of spiritual purity, is a way to restrain the secularization of power and defend their prerogatives. Still, the fact that the ban is widely seen as the Khalif's reaction to an incident of political violence does serve as a positive reminder to the country's leaders that the brotherhoods stand for peace and the democratic consensus. END COMMENT.

JACOBS